

by the evidence of any person that has been brought before us, and Mr. Mitchelson has admitted that his suspicions have not been substantiated, and that he regrets he ever brought them forward.

Mr. Mitchelson, in his letter and also in his evidence, states that rumours were floating about injurious to the characters of two Ministers of the Crown; and that, though not believing them himself, he thought it desirable that they should be cleared away by the appointment of a Commission. Mr. Chambers, the honorary secretary of the Vigilance Committee, gave form to these rumours by declaring his belief that Sir Julius Vogel had been bribed by Mr. Stark. On hearing his evidence, we declared that if a shadow of evidence could be brought forward in its support we would urge the Ministers to come up from Wellington to meet it. No such evidence has been forthcoming, and we consider it a baseless malevolent suspicion, unworthy of further notice.

The numerous land agents and other authorities who have been examined as to the value of the property differ very much in their estimates. We subjoin the names and cash valuations of some of them, who appear to us to be most reliable: Mr. W. Aitken, £15,000; Captain Beere, £12,000 to £14,000; Mr. B. Tanner (£9,000 and improvements), £13,000; Mr. J. Bond, £12,000; Mr. E. W. Alison (cash value of his offer of £16,000 on terms), £12,000; Mr. F. G. Ewington, £10,000; Mr. O. Mays, £10,000; Mr. J. Dacre, £9,000; Mr. T. Melville, £9,000; Mr. D. Goldie (£9,000 less than the Government paid), £8,100; Mr. C. Williamson, £8,000.

As these experts differ so materially in their valuations, we find it impossible to fix definitely the exact value of the land. Mr. Stark had been endeavouring to sell portions of the block at comparatively low prices since June, 1884, through various agents; and in February, 1885, he placed the whole block in Mr. Brown's hands for sale for £7,500, and there is little doubt but at that time the Government might have obtained it for that amount had they employed a private agent to secure it; but in April, 1885, when they had entered upon the land to survey the site for the battery, Mr. Stark withdrew it from private sale, saying that the Government were going to take it, and that he now expected to get £20,000 for it.

We consider that the price paid for the land was in excess of its value, but are of opinion that there was no irregularity in the mode of conducting or completing the purchase. The Minister for Public Works was guided by the opinions of the usual officers of the department, which, he has stated, were confirmed by other inquiries he had made; and Mr. Brewer, the Land Purchase Officer, who had only recently arrived in the district, was guided by the property-tax valuation, and we consider his conduct throughout the negotiations was quite free from blame.

We entirely acquit Mr. Seaman of any complicity in any attempt to defraud the Government, and we consider that his excessive valuation, which he expected Mr. Stark to object to, was prompted by his desire to serve the interests of his department. It is impossible to forecast what might have resulted from an appeal to a Compensation Court.

At the close of our proceedings an application was made on behalf of Messrs. Alison and Seaman, asking us to award them costs under the 6th section of "The Commissioners' Powers Act 1867 Amendment Act, 1872," in consideration of the expense they had been put to in attending the Commission and defending themselves against the allegations that had been made against them. We decline to award costs against any party, and leave it for the Government to determine whether their officers are entitled to compensation from them for the expenses they have incurred in attending this inquiry.

Given under our hands and seals at Auckland, this first day of November, 1886.

T. M. HAULTAIN.
G. W. HARVEY.
RICHARD WESTENRA.

List of Witnesses.—1886, October 14th: Oliver Mays, J. Mays, J. Dacre, W. S. Cochrane. October 15th: Herbert Ashton, A. Ashton, R. J. Roberts, R. Lundon, A. W. P. Thomas, T. L. White. October 16th, J. Ross, C. Williamson, T. Melville, Henry Ashton. October 18th: J. C. King, Josiah Martin, E. Bartley, S. Vaile, S. P. Smith, W. H. Hales. October 19th: W. Philcox, C. Kingsford, G. Brown, A. Heather, J. R. Gascoine, J. Frater, J. Hull, B. Tanner, R. Duder. October 20th: E. Hammond, G. R. Burgess, E. Mitchelson, D. S. Chambers. October 21st: D. Goldie, Dr. Vines, T. B. Howarth, S. Henderson, J. R. Randerson. October 22nd: F. G. Ewington, E. Bell, S. Brooking, W. Aitken, S. Eastham, G. Beere, C. Dacre. October 25th: J. Bond, E. W. Allison. October 26th: Thos. Seaman, H. M. Brewer, G. Headly.

[Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, nil; printing (1,350 copies), £2 1s. 6d.]

By Authority: GEORGE DRDSBURY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1887.